



Learning Restraint: The Role of Political Education in Armed Group Behavior Toward Civilians

Amelia Hoover Green



Simons Papers in Security and Development

No. 30/2013 | December 2013

The **Simons Papers in Security and Development** are edited and published at the School for International Studies, Simon Fraser University. The papers serve to disseminate research work in progress by the School's faculty and associated and visiting scholars. Our aim is to encourage the exchange of ideas and academic debate. Inclusion of a paper in the series should not limit subsequent publication in any other venue. All papers can be downloaded free of charge from our website, www.sfu.ca/internationalstudies.

The series is supported by the Simons Foundation.

A grant from Canada's Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) supported the October 2013 workshop, on "Socialization and Organized Political Violence", at which this paper was presented and critiqued.

Series editor: Jeffrey T. Checkel

Managing editor: Martha Snodgrass

Hoover Green, Amelia, *Learning Restraint: The Role of Political Education in Armed Group Behavior Toward Civilians*, Simons Papers in Security and Development, No. 30/2013, School for International Studies, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, December 2013.

ISSN 1922-5725

Copyright remains with the author. Reproduction for other purposes than personal research, whether in hard copy or electronically, requires the consent of the author(s). If cited or quoted, reference should be made to the full name of the author(s), the title, the working paper number and year, and the publisher.

Copyright for this issue: Amelia Hoover Green, [ameliahoovergreen\(a\)gmail.com](mailto:ameliahoovergreen(a)gmail.com).

School for International Studies
Simon Fraser University
Suite 7200 - 515 West Hastings Street
Vancouver, BC Canada V6B 5K3



Learning Restraint: The Role of Political Education in Armed Group Behavior Toward Civilians

Simons Papers in Security and Development
No. 30/2013 | December 2013

Abstract:

Recent scholarship on violence against civilians during armed conflict has emphasized the role of armed group institutions in promoting and, occasionally, controlling atrocities. Given the many causal mechanisms identified (training, ideology, contestation, unit leadership), it remains unclear which of them does the explanatory work in which settings. This paper argues that extrinsic motivations (rewards and punishments) are insufficient to maintain behavioral control, and control is most effective when commanders work to align combatants' preferences with their own. The argument is tested on micro-level evidence drawn from civil war in El Salvador.

About the author:

Amelia Hoover Green is an Assistant Professor in the Department of History and Politics at Drexel University and a consultant to the Human Rights Data Analysis Group. Her research investigates how information, ideologies and behavioral norms are transmitted through hierarchical organizations. She has published in *Journal of Peace Research*, *Comparative Political Studies* and *Foreign Affairs*. Hoover Green's PhD in political science is from Yale University.

About the publisher:

The School for International Studies (SIS) fosters innovative interdisciplinary research and teaching programs concerned with a range of global issues, but with a particular emphasis on international development, and on global governance and security. The School aims to link theory, practice and engagement with other societies and cultures, while offering students a challenging and multi-faceted learning experience. SIS is located within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Simon Fraser University. Our website is www.sfu.ca/internationalstudies.

Learning Restraint: The Role of Political Education in Armed Group Behavior Toward Civilians

Introduction

Recent scholarship on violence against civilians during armed conflict has emphasized the role of armed group institutions in promoting and, occasionally, controlling atrocities. Frequently, researchers frame armed group institutions as responses to a principal–agent problem, in which commanders attempt to incentivize specific combatant behaviors (Gates 2002; Mitchell [2004] 2009; Humphreys and Weinstein 2006; Weinstein 2007). Others, without formally framing the issue in principal–agent terms, nevertheless emphasize the importance of armed group institutions in shaping combatant behavior. Some of the causal mechanisms proposed include training mechanisms (Hoover Green 2011), group ideology (Balcells and Kalyvas 2010; Thaler 2012), combatant socialization, (Cohen 2013a), internal contestation (Cunningham, Bakke, and Seymour 2012), and unit leadership (Manekin 2013).

This focus on armed group institutions has provided a useful counterpoint to literatures that propose a rationalist “logic” of violence in which contestation or control predominates (Kalyvas, 2006; also see Valentino et al. 2004; Downes 2008) and in which armed groups are frequently treated as unitary actors. However, while an institutional perspective is undoubtedly valuable, it remains unclear *which* of the many institutions considered “does the work.” This is particularly so because several of the institutional characteristics under consideration are, if not causally linked, then often empirically associated: there is considerable overlap between the set of armed groups that use forced recruitment, those that offer minimal training, those lacking strong ideologies, those that do not intend to govern, and those without a strong hierarchy.

This article offers a theoretical perspective that integrates several insights from scholarship on armed group institutions. In brief, I observe that all commanders must *both* render large groups of recruits prone to violence *and* maintain some control over the violence that fighters wield. For brevity’s sake, I refer to this difficulty as the “Commander’s Dilemma” below. I further observe that extrinsic motivations (rewards and punishments) are, for a number of reasons, insufficient to maintain behavioral control. Thus, I reason that behavioral control is

most effectively maintained when commanders work to align combatants' preferences with their own (that is, when commanders provide strong intrinsic incentives for desired behaviors).

Below, I focus on one type of institution for preference alignment: political education. By "political education" I mean formal training focused not on military skills but on the history, goals or purposes of the conflict, and/or on group identity and norms. After laying out a set of empirical implications, I turn to micro-level evidence from civil war in El Salvador. The Salvadoran case is particularly useful because it shows significant variation both across and within armed groups, on several independent and dependent variables. By focusing on times and places in which key independent variables diverge, we can begin to distinguish between alternative explanations for armed group behavior toward civilians.

Who or what is "rational"?

Consistent with a broader "rationalist turn" in political science, a number of scholars – perhaps most notably Kalyvas (2006), Valentino et al. (2004), and Downes (2008) – have theorized violence against non-combatants as an outcome of strategic decisions by armed organizations, arguing against a view of violence as "wanton and senseless" (Kalyvas 1999). In the context of armed conflict, these approaches make two key assumptions: that armed group decisions are rational, and that armed groups are unitary, that is, that all command decisions are perfectly translated to, and perfectly implemented by, each member of the group. In these models, indiscriminate violence against civilians typically occurs because of information failures or as the best of bad options.

Theorists differ substantially in their accounts of which strategic logics drive violence against civilians. Kalyvas (2006) tested the proposition that, in essence, territorial control compels civilian loyalty (rather than the reverse). Valentino et al. (2004) argued that massacres follow a strategic logic: during guerrilla wars, large-scale civilian killings are more likely when the government faces a credible threat from guerrillas, and/or when civilian populations provide support to guerrillas. Downes (2008), analyzing attacks on civilians by state forces during conventional wars, found that some attacks followed an instrumental logic of "desperation" (i.e.,

they occurred when leaders were desperate to end prolonged conflicts), while others occurred when states wished to annex territory.

These results suggest that many or most armed group decisions about violence against civilians are rational in at least a limited sense (that is, rational under conditions of considerable information asymmetry, or rational despite extremely limited options). It is worth noting, though, that “rational,” strategic thinking may imply quite different decisions for different commanders.

To take one example, Ricks (2006) considers differing approaches to counterinsurgency warfare within the US Army’s V Corps during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Ricks writes of the Army’s V Corps, in which Gen. Ricardo Sanchez devolved considerable authority to division commanders, that “The decentralization...sometimes extended even further down [the chain of command within V Corps], to the levels of brigades and battalions” (234). Ricks’ source recounts that two brigades within the Army’s 4th Infantry Division occupied sectors that lay “side by side in the Sunni Triangle” (234), yet employed vastly differing levels and tactics of violence. Similarly, a number of V Corps officers interviewed by Ricks harshly criticized Gen. Raymond Odierno’s tactical approach with the 4th Infantry Division, calling it unnecessarily harsh and violent toward local populations.

Yet Ricks also clarifies that the commanders involved in prosecuting the war in Iraq, whether they chose a “hearts and minds” approach or not, couched their decisions in rational language. Those who pursued less violent tactics did so because of their belief that such approaches were effective; similarly, those who chose displays of military might did so because they believed that insurgents would respond to a show of strength and civilians would respond to the provision of order. In this case as in many others, high-level officers thought strategically about the employment of force, as the rationalist approach would suggest. Yet their carefully calculated decisions about the costs and benefits of exposing civilian populations to violence reached divergent conclusions.

Despite the wide variation in what may be viewed as “strategic” behavior, commanders seem unlikely to make decisions that are obviously strategically harmful. While not all commanders (act as if they) have an incentive to win, nearly all face strong incentives *not to lose*, and consequently are at least loosely constrained by strategic logic. Still, significant

amounts of armed group behavior fail to meet even this relaxed constraint. Many acts of violence against civilians – not only massacres, but also non-lethal forms of violence, isolated killings and other acts – are committed without, or even in defiance of, explicit orders from above. Thus, while it is plausible to attribute limited rational decision-making to armed group leaders, it is less reasonable to assume that the rational preferences of leaders are shared – and implemented – further down the chain of command. Such an assumption elides significant differences in command and control between different armed groups and incorrectly predicts that, across conflicts, armed groups facing similar strategic situations will choose, and implement, similar patterns of violence against civilians.

In what follows I assume that armed group commanders are rational in the limited sense described above – that they will, at minimum, make decisions that are not obviously harmful to the broader military effort. However, it discards the notion of the unitary armed group, focusing instead on variation in commanders' capacities to enforce their decisions. This variation results from attempts to resolve the Dilemma anticipated by the framework's name: commanders face conflicting imperatives. They must create from a large group of recruits a large group of combatants who are both willing and able to kill; at the same time, they must retain at least some control over the resulting violence. The following section addresses the imperative to alter combatants' initial preferences, contrasting that imperative with the assumption of fixed preferences often present in the political science literature.

Moral injury and combatant “preferences”

Several scholars, including Gates (2002), Mitchell (2004), and Weinstein (2007), have developed models based on the assumption of non-unitary armed groups. Whether formally or more heuristically, these accounts frequently employ principal–agent models originally formulated in the economics literature (e.g., Laffont and Martimort 2009). Notably, though, most such accounts assume fixed preferences on the part of both commanders and combatants; in consequence, these models predict that variation in patterns of violence should be associated with variation in initial characteristics or commanders' practical ability to control combatant

behaviors. In this section, I argue that combatant “preferences” over violence change throughout the period of service, and I sketch some empirical implications of this fact.

In traditional principal–agent modeling, the central problem is the maximization of efficiency in contracting between two actors, where one actor has access to private information about relevant facts such as skill, effort or trustworthiness. Contracts represent an attempt to mitigate conflicts of interest between principals – those who compensate others to act in their interests – and agents – those who receive compensation in exchange for acting in the principal’s interests.

How do these models apply in the case of armed group organizations? Typically, commanders are seen as “principals” and combatants as “agents,” and the contractual (or implied contractual) relationship between commanders and combatants determines the extent to which combatants behave in accordance with commanders’ preferences. (Commanders’ preferences are often assumed to be aligned with the strategic interest of the group, but this is not necessary: commanders may, for example, be primarily motivated by personal enrichment.) Gates (2002), applying a traditional principal–agent model to the problem of command and control, predicts that combatants more “distant” from armed group leaders (in preferences, physical location, or observability) were more likely to disobey. Gates’ model makes no assumptions about the preferences of commanders or combatants, and consequently yields few concrete predictions not related to the broad concept of “distance.”

By contrast, Mitchell (2004) argues that combatants may prefer maximal violence, i.e., that combatants may deviate from leaders’ preferences through “overwork,” rather than by shirking as in traditional models. Weinstein (2007) builds on this principal–agent logic, specifying a model of adverse selection in which resource endowments at the outset of a period of conflict determine combatants’ later behavior, largely via the incentives that groups offer new recruits. According to Weinstein’s model, armed groups that can recruit via material incentives generally do, attracting recruits whose mercenary approach leads to increased violence against civilians. By contrast, those that can offer only solidary incentives tend to recruit committed members whose use of violence is simpler to restrain. Weinstein finds evidence that initial

resource availability is associated with fighters' treatment of civilians – independent of the strategic situation(s) facing armed group leaders.

As noted above, a key feature of these principal–agent approaches to violence in armed conflict is the assumption of fixed preferences on the part of both principals and agents. Both Mitchell and Weinstein, in assuming fixed preferences, predict that variation in violence against civilians should be associated with variations in initial preferences, initial conditions and/or the severity of informational asymmetries. However, while the assumption of fixed preferences makes such models tractable, it is not a plausible characterization of military life. Armed groups are “total institutions” (cf. Goffman 1961); they require – and frequently advertise – the ability to change both combatants' behaviors and their self-concepts, particularly with respect to violence. Recruits enter armed groups with widely varying preferences (including preferences over violence), but socialization processes break down these initial preferences and build, in their place, norms and preferences that better serve group goals.¹

If uniformity of attitude and behavior is important to armed group success, willingness to kill is vital. Yet many recruits are ill-prepared to kill other humans. Grossman (1996), for example, investigates resistance to killing among US troops in conflicts from the Civil War to Vietnam. In his seminal study *Men Against Fire*, Marshall (2000 [1947]) finds that only a small minority of World War II infantry troops – just 15% – actually fired a weapon in combat. The accuracy of Marshall's specific claim has been questioned (see, e.g., Chambers 2003). Nevertheless, the US military recognized that resistance to killing could constitute a significant tactical disadvantage. Marshall's work led to significant changes in soldier training (Grossman 1996: 35) aimed at habituating recruits to violence against other humans. These included target practice with images of people, rather than abstractions like the bull's eye, and other measures designed to desensitize soldiers to the reality of battlefield killing.

¹ Note also, however, that groups in which members' individual attitudes or predispositions are heterogeneous may nevertheless display uniform behavior. For example, combatants who perceive themselves as the only individual opposing a group decision are likely to express agreement even when the group's contention is clearly false (Asch 1956). Conformity effects are strengthened under conditions of threat, uncertainty or group homogeneity (e.g., Staw et al 1981, Dion 1979, Harrison and Connors 1984), all of which are likely to be present in the context of a small group during armed conflict.

Grossman (1996) argues that the key goal of military training is the elimination of natural hesitation and disgust at violence – not, for example, the development of discipline or esprit de corps – and that this process represents a permanent psychological loss to the combatant. Similarly, Nadelson (2005: 37) has written, “the soldier’s real work is in killing...and the soldier who kills is permanently changed, fixed to the death he has made.” These changes, beginning in training and continuing through combat experiences, have recently been considered together under the category “moral injury,” defined as “disruption in an individual’s sense of morality and capacity to behave in a just manner” (Drescher et al. 2011: 111). Moral injury is thus a useful framework for considering the psychological mechanisms that underpin positive correlations between length of combat deployment and levels of peacetime violent behavior. To state the case in the terms of the principal–agent problem framed above: military training necessarily increases preferences for violent behavior, and combat experiences amplify these increases. Preferences are far from fixed. Yet these psychological realities generally do not appear in political science accounts of violence during armed conflict.

The Commander’s Dilemma, by contrast, assumes that moral injuries frequently occur to combatants, and that both the likelihood and the average severity of moral injury increase with length of service. Following from the Drescher et al. definition of moral injury as disruption or impairment to one’s capacity to behave justly, we can identify a number of social and psychological mechanisms that may contribute to moral injury (i.e., that may underlie decreased ability to identify one’s actions as immoral or to refrain from actions so identified).

The process of military socialization – including formal training as well as informal “training” such as hazing traditions – is often described as a process that strips away pre-military norms and identities, replacing them with group norms and identities (see, e.g., review in Wood 2009). Military socialization celebrates obedience to one’s superiors, loyalty to one’s comrades and “courage under fire,” but these virtues take specific forms. “Obedience” and “loyalty” come to mean behavioral conformity (cf. Asch 1956); “courage” implies traditional masculinity and physical toughness (Arkin and Dobrovsky 1978; Dunivin 1991, 1997).

Military socialization typically carries strong overt and covert messages about gender, both in its equation of courage with manliness and in its frequent denigration of the feminine

(e.g., Burke 2004; Goldstein 2003). It is unclear whether these gendered practices lead to attitude changes, whether those who value traditional gender presentation self-select military service, or both. However, in comparison with non-military persons of the same age, male enlisted soldiers endorse significantly more traditional, anti-feminine, toughness-oriented masculinities (Kurpius and Lucart 2000, Wechsler Segal 1999). Traditional masculinities are, in turn, strongly associated with endorsement of rape mythologies (e.g., Quackenbush 1989, Locke and Mahalik 2005). Endorsement of rape mythologies is correlated with self-reported propensity to commit sexual violence (Bohner et al. 2006). A significant body of research suggests that “militarized masculinity” is an important factor in the perpetration of wartime sexual violence in particular (e.g., Enloe 1993, Gill 1997, Burke 2004, Baaz and Stern 2009). Thus, the generally increased predisposition to violence associated with military training may be particularly heightened for sexual violence.

Combat conditions magnify the preference changes begun with initial military socialization, as a number of social psychology findings suggest. Where violence is ordered by superiors, Milgram’s classic studies of obedience (1975) suggest that the majority of persons will obey even a patently illegal or personally distasteful order; Milgram found, moreover, that even minor signifiers of authority, such as white coats and university settings, decisively shifted subject behaviors toward obedience. Presumably the armed group setting, where obedience to superiors is a foundational value and disobedience to the immediate superior is severely punished (Shibutami 1978; Osiel 1999), would magnify this effect. As members of a large group, combatants may rationalize their own violent behavior as a small part of a larger, inevitable process (cf. Arendt 1977, Diener 1980). Via “role adoption” (e.g. Haney et al. 1973 – but see Reicher and Haslam 2006), subjects identified randomly as “prison guards” readily adopted and performed behaviors they perceived as belonging to that role.

Perhaps the most important mechanism underlying violence against non-combatants is simple desensitization: committing (or, in some formulations, simply witnessing) one act of violence renders it psychologically easier to commit further violence. Yet “desensitization,” itself an element of the moral injury catch-all, encompasses several potential causal pathways. Among the most extensively researched of these is cognitive dissonance, which arises when

one's beliefs (for example, beliefs about one's willingness to commit violence against civilians) fail to match one's behavior. When such a mismatch occurs, the meta-cognitive need to harmonize beliefs and behavior results in changed beliefs (Festinger and Carlsmith 1959). Other theorists point to "habituation" or "desensitization," *per se*, as the relevant mechanism, and suggest that simple exposure lowers combatants' inhibitions surrounding violence.

A final set of factors underlying moral injury is more straightforwardly emotional. Experiences of trauma, stress, uncertainty, fear, and anger, all common during combat, are associated with diminished capacity for logical reasoning and increased aggression (e.g., Song et al. 1998; Keinan 1987; Beckham, Moore and Reynolds 2000; Jakupcak and Tull 2005). These short-term experiences lay the foundation for moral injuries, which are cumulative and long-term.

To summarize: commanders face a strategic imperative to create a corps of combatants who maintain uniform behaviors and attitudes, and to reduce or eliminate combatants resistance to violence. This is, in itself, a moral injury that generally increases combatants predisposition to commit violence. Combat conditions aggravate moral injuries through a multitude of causal pathways, further increasing propensities to violence. Thus, combatants are confronted with many factors known to be associated with violent behavior, at high levels, much of the time. Moral injury can be mitigated, but it cannot be avoided: armed group leaders must morally injure recruits and must send combatants into battle in order to achieve military success (or at least stave off failure).

Empirically, given the frequency and severity of moral injury among combatants, we should expect to observe high levels of violence, and many types of violence, against civilians by all armed groups. We might particularly expect to see sexual violence strongly represented in the "repertoire of violence" (Ron 1997, 2000; Hoover Green 2011) against civilians. Yet not all armed groups (and not all units within armed groups) use high levels of violence against civilians. Not all use wide repertoires of violence. Below I argue that repertoire variations originate with military leaders' struggle for operational control over the violent groups they create.

Maintaining control: Extrinsic versus intrinsic incentives

Combat effectiveness requires that armed group leaders train combatants to use violence unhesitatingly, and place combatants in combat situations, which further increase propensities to violent behavior. Yet combat effectiveness also requires that commanders maintain control over the timing, targeting and type of violence. At a bare minimum, commanders must ensure that combatants do not turn on their leaders. Commanders who prefer to win, or to remain party to the conflict – most commanders – would generally prefer to maintain some control over combatant violence.²

In considering potential resolutions of the commanders dilemma, I turn, like Gates (2002), Mitchell (2004), Hovil and Werker (2005), and Weinstein (2007), to insights from principal–agent modeling. Commanders have two types of tools for controlling the production of violence. They may offer extrinsic incentives (i.e., social or material rewards and punishments) for correct behavior, without regard to combatant preferences. Extrinsic incentives rely on rational calculation, in which the (dis)pleasure of performing a behavior is weighed against the expected (dis)pleasure of the punishment or reward. Alternatively, leaders may attempt to alter combatants preferences to match their own, i.e., they may attempt to make correct behavior (or the absence of incorrect behavior) intrinsically rewarding. The difference between intrinsic and extrinsic rewards should not be seen as identical to the difference between tangible and intangible benefits. Rather, as in Stowe (2006), intrinsic rewards for a given action (“morale,” in Stowe’s model) are part of the agent’s underlying preferences, not part of a package of tangible or intangible benefits. In reality, of course, extrinsic and intrinsic rewards often accompany one another. But considering them as if fully separable carries analytical benefits, since extrinsic incentives and preference changes differ significantly in terms of their costs and levels of effectiveness over space, time, and situation.

² Leaders whose groups rely on the support of non-combatants for information (and, often, materiel and food) (e.g. Kalyvas 2006, Wood 2003) have still stronger incentives to control violence against non-combatants. By implication, then, the commanders dilemma should be more pressing for the leaders of armed groups engaged in irregular warfare than for those engaged in more traditional conflicts. The discussion here is framed in more general terms, however; it applies to any armed group, state or non-state, engaged in any conflict, regular or irregular, in which combatants have frequent contact with civilian populations.

In the standard principal–agent model, conflicts of interest between the principal and agent are resolved, to the extent possible, by a set of enforceable extrinsic incentives (piece rates, productivity bonuses, and so on). Presumably this problem could be solved similarly in the military context: both shirking and overproduction could be prevented by delineating what behaviors are allowable, and then spelling out a series of rewards for proper behavior and punishments for improper behavior. In some sense, this is precisely how military discipline is expected to work.

Yet external incentives and disincentives, obvious and effective as they may seem, are frequently unenforceable in the military context. This is true for at least two reasons. First, enforceable contracts are possible only when the agent’s production can be monitored, as it often cannot in a conflict setting. In addition, combat situations impede or preclude rational calculation, a key assumption of the standard principal–agent model. In some cases, consistent with the social psychological results described above, participating in war crimes seems normal (or even normative). In other cases, soldiers understand that their behaviors are against the rules, but calculate that their behavior will not be detected, or that it will not be punished, or that the punishment is an acceptable cost. In many cases, however, participation in unsanctioned violence is the result of uncalculating panic or rage. Whether because the risk of detection is low or because punishments are too remote to alter combatants’ decisions, extrinsic incentives alone are poor tools for controlling warzone violence.

Given the ineffectiveness of behavioral control using extrinsic incentives alone, commanders must endeavor to provide intrinsic incentives for controlled violence. (Note that, by “controlled violence,” I mean violence that is in line with command preferences, not necessarily low levels of violence.) A number of armed group institutions or practices are implicated in shaping combatant preferences: “good” types may be selected at recruitment, combatants may internalize group norms via informal processes, combatants may be formally instructed or persuaded, or – perhaps most likely – several factors may play a role. As noted above, those who are “good types” at recruitment may nevertheless develop “bad” preferences for violence over the course of military training and deployment. Internalization of group norms via informal

mechanisms may be difficult to disentangle from simple social pressure. Consequently, in what follows I focus on the role of explicit instruction.

Below, I use the term “political education” (or the acronym “PE”) to mean *explicit, organized, ongoing instruction that informs combatants about an armed group’s goals, values, or political ideology*. PE may or may not be conducted with the explicit purpose of advancing discipline or civilian protection. I use the term “political education for restraint” (“PER”) to refer to the subset of PE that *links disciplined or restrained behavior to the armed group’s goals, values or political ideology*.

Literature in international relations has addressed the political effects of educational institutions; the key finding for the purposes of this study is that the content and context of educational institutions, rather than their mere presence or absence, determine whether and how such institutions affect politics. For example, Darden and Grzymala-Busse (2006) find a long-lasting effect of pre-Communist national education programs upon post-Communist governance. They write: “Schooling provides the one clear channel for the deliberate and systematic inculcation of a set of values” (90). Darden and Grzymala-Busse are referencing nineteenth- and early twentieth-century state building, but the sentiment applies to the twenty-first-century army or insurgency, as well (see also Darden 2011, on education and military mobilization).

Explicit instruction about group goals and strategies may take many forms. Groups founded on a revolutionary platform may explicitly address equity and nonviolence in the “new society,” and/or the military organization as the foundation of the revolutionary society. Groups may also build cultures of asceticism and self-denial. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), for example, maintained strong internal norms of self-denial; during most periods of the Sri Lankan conflict, combatants were expected to remain celibate (Wood 2009). In Colombia, combatants of the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) are discouraged from sexual relationships and are generally stripped of individual property (Gutierrez Sanín 2004). Both the FARC and the LTTE are highly ideological organizations, and envision very specific outcomes in the revolutionary society. However, PE in the sense I intend here need not be “ideological” in the typical sense. It may reinforce respect for noncombatants by reframing them as part of the group, rather than subject populations; by suggesting that the purpose of the war is

dignity for the non-combatant; or by appealing to group values. For example, although it is an explicitly (though not always actually) apolitical institution, the United States military has stressed the value of professionalism, including “professional” treatment of civilian populations (Huntington 1985; for current examples of US military discourse on professionalism, see Center for the Army Profession and Ethic 2012; Formica 2012; Chandler 2012).

Several causal mechanisms link belief change to behavioral change in the military context. High levels of stress and fear decrease decision-makers cognitive effort, such that habitual or instinctive behavior can override rational calculations about external rules. Consequently, one key benefit of political education is the provision of a cognitively accessible “default setting” in high-stress circumstances. Osiel (1999), in a study of service members who refused illegal orders, suggests that a “sense of purpose” regarding violence and conflict is what set those who refused apart from other soldiers. Bass (1990) found that small groups are more effective at assigned tasks when group leaders experience “conviction in the righteousness of their beliefs” and when other group members “strongly identify” with leaders’ choices.

Like disciplinary regimes, behavioral control via preference change is relatively costly for armed groups. However, the costs of the two mechanisms are distributed differently. Training that includes political indoctrination is likely to be more time-consuming than is strictly military instruction, and building indoctrination institutions requires a significant up-front investment, as well as continuing indoctrination efforts throughout combatants period of service. Moreover, because so many individual-level triggers to violence result from continued combat exposure, messages of restraint must be taught and re-taught over time. In contrast, disciplinary mechanisms may have significantly lower up-front costs; however, discipline via extrinsic incentives becomes relatively more expensive as combatants spend more time in active combat.

Empirical Implications

The Commander’s Dilemma has a number of empirical implications for variation in violence, across a number of dimensions. In previous work (Hoover Green 2011), I focused largely upon repertoires of violence (as opposed to levels of violence). Here I consider variation in levels of violence as well as variation in repertoires of violence. I draw out implications at the

micro level (across individuals, sub-groups and groups within a conflict) and at the macro level (across groups and conflicts).

The most basic implication of the theory concerns the role of political education for restraint (or analogous preference-change institutions) in shaping violence against civilians. If commanders are rational in even a limited way, and combatants' preferences for violence are increased by moral injury, then combatants in groups without PER should commit higher levels of un-ordered violence against civilians (and, hence, higher overall levels of violence against civilians) than those in PER groups. Moreover, variation in levels and/or repertoires of violence should be associated with variation in groups' institutions for political education, independent of variations in strategic situation, resource endowments, or other factors.

Rational commanders may (and frequently do) order civilian killings (cf. Kalyvas 2006, Valentino et al. 2004). However, commanders with some incentive to protect (or appear to protect) civilian populations seldom explicitly order crimes that may be viewed as opportunistic – sexual violence and looting, for example. Thus, the repertoires of violence committed by PER and non-PER groups should also differ. By “repertoires of violence,” I mean the set of types of violence frequently used against civilians, and their relative proportions (Hoover Green 2011, and see Ron 1997, 2001). Repertoires of violence may be narrow – in the sense that all or nearly all violence is concentrated in very few types of violence – or broad, in the sense that combatants commit many types of violence. They may also be uniform (across sub-groups, across time, and so on) or highly variable. We should expect to observe that non-PER groups commit wider, less uniform repertoires of violence, and higher levels of sexual violence and looting.

Political education and similar programs also should mediate relationships between time and space, on one hand, and violence against civilians, on the other. Because of the behavioral effects of moral injury, in non-PER groups we would expect to observe higher levels of violence and broader repertoires of violence to be associated with increasing conflict duration, independent of the effects of variation in strategic situations. PER groups, on the other hand, should commit relatively similar levels and repertoires of violence over time. Similarly, within non-PER groups, we should expect that sub-groups farther from official oversight commit more violence and wider repertoires of violence, whereas the presence of official oversight should

have little effect on the behavior of PER sub-groups. And finally, where non-PER groups use forced recruitment, we should expect them to engage in higher levels of both general and sexual violence against civilians, as well as wider repertoires of violence; again, this association is not expected to exist for PER groups.

These hypotheses should also hold across individual fighters: those who receive more political education should commit fewer overall acts of violence against civilian, and narrower repertoires of violence. We should expect, further, that sexual violence is rare among the repertoires of violence of these fighters. In addition, the amount of political education received by a given fighter should diminish the usual positive correlation between length of service and violence against civilians. Additionally, some types of armed groups are more likely to employ political education, and particularly political education for restraint. For example, state armed forces are more likely to be formally apolitical than are non-state armed groups. Thus we should expect that state groups employ, on average, higher levels and wider repertoires of violence against civilians than do non-state armed groups.

Lastly, it is important to note that (1) all these hypothesized associations are independent of variation in strategic situation, that (2) all assume some functioning disciplinary apparatus, and that (3) commanders have some strategic incentive to protect civilians.

Evidence from El Salvador

This section tests the hypotheses laid out above by describing within-conflict variation in institutions for political education and indoctrination among armed groups that contested the Salvadoran civil war (1980–92). The Salvadoran case is valuable because it shows significant variation, both across and within groups, on both key independent variables (institutions for PE/PER, recruitment tactics, strategic approach and level of contestation, among others) and dependent variables (measures of the level and repertoire of violence). In addition, the existence of three separate datasets on violence against civilians, which allowed me to estimate civilian casualties using Multiple Systems Estimation (MSE) (see Ball et al. 2003; Price et al. 2010; Hoover Green 2011, chapter 7). The results generally support the Commander's Dilemma framework. In particular, variation in violence across armed groups, and within armed groups

over time, tracks variation in institutions for training and indoctrination more closely than it tracks either strategic changes or changes in other institutions.

Stanley (1996) aptly describes El Salvador's repressive military dictatorship as a "protection racket" in which military leaders protected the interests of El Salvador's economic elites in exchange for both power in government (the military held the Presidency, with little interruption, for most of the twentieth century) and economic favors (officers held control over lucrative public utilities such as telephone service). Indeed, Guardia Nacional (GN, National Guard) units were often quartered on the estates of large landowners, where they assisted by ensuring that an increasingly destitute and landless peasant class continued to labor quiescently.

Until relatively late in the 1970's, the armed left represented just a small minority of overall opposition to the government. As a moderate protest movement gained power, however, state repression intensified dramatically. As Arnson (2003) and others have documented, most units of the Salvadoran armed forces, and all security forces, supported death squads beginning in the late 1970's, a fact that contributed to the near-eradication of those who pushed for reform (rather than revolution). State repression rose dramatically after the fall of the Romero regime (1977–79) and the installation of a civilian-military junta. Casualties in 1979 are unknown. However, El Salvador was effectively at war well before its revolutionary group announced itself. Non-violent gatherings, including a protest against the extravagant Miss Universe contest of 1979 and the funeral for assassinated Archbishop Oscar Romero (March 1980) were routinely fired upon by government forces. By the time of the insurgent coalition's formal unification in October 1980, state violence had already killed thousands of noncombatants. Insurgent factions had amassed tens of millions of dollars in ransom from kidnappings, engaged in gun battles with government's rural "civil defense" organization (ORDEN, *Organización Democrática Nacional*), and killed an unknown number of noncombatants suspected of supporting the governments repressive efforts. Wood (2003: 27) writes, "Any possibility of a broad revolutionary alliance including centrist forces was eliminated" following the kidnappings and killings of 6 center-left leaders by state forces in November 1980.

The ensuing civil war (1980–92) pitted five insurgent organizations (two large groups and three smaller groups, operating under a unified command structure) against several state

forces, including militarized security forces, regular army troops, and specially trained and equipped “immediate reaction battalions” or BIRI’s. (For the purposes of this investigation, I do not consider groups informally associated with the state, such as civil defense patrols and death squads.) The insurgents operated as the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN, Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) and adhered to a generally Marxist-Leninist ideology and strategy, inspired also by Liberation Theology – although significant internal debates regarding both ideology and strategy existed, as I describe below.

The conflict can be divided into three rough phases. First – despite the failure of an initial FMLN “Final Offensive” – the rebels gained significant ground during the early 1980’s, holding at one point upwards of 30% of the country’s territory and operating effectively as a regular army, with large fighting units and fixed encampments. However, American support for government forces (particularly the advent of helicopter gunships) forced a stalemate during much of the mid- and late 1980s. FMLN forces responded in this second phase by breaking their forces into smaller, more mobile units, conducting hit-and-run attacks against government formations. The group continued to hold and govern territory, particularly in the northern departments of Morazán and Chalatenango. A major FMLN offensive in late 1989 brought a resurgence in violence, particularly in San Salvador, but was ultimately not decisive. Peace talks began in earnest in 1990 and concluded with a ceasefire in 1992.

Data on political education reported below are drawn from two major sources: first, a set of 50 in-depth, loosely structured interviews with former low-level combatants across all armed groups, and second, approximately 360 shorter, structured interviews, again with representation from all rebel and government factions. Because formal structures for political education can vary significantly from combatants’ on-the-ground experiences, I asked a set of questions designed to discern the extent to which combatants actually received instruction in ideology, human rights, the role of civilians, and other topics. In particular, I asked excombatants whether they recalled what the purpose of the war was, and how they learned that information; whether anyone ever gave them books or pamphlets, and what those books or pamphlets were about; and what the group’s most important behavioral rules were. I also drew on archival and documentary evidence regarding the training and ideology in government and FMLN groups.

To examine patterns of violence, I considered three data sources: the statistical annex to the United Nations-sponsored Truth Commission for El Salvador (1993), coded records of the non-governmental *Comisión de Derechos Humanos* de El Salvador (CDHES, the Commission for Human Rights of El Salvador), and coded records of the Archbishop of San Salvador's Office of Legal Aid. Together, these sources report over 60,000 episodes of violence, of which nearly 50,000 are unique records with named victims.

The differences between PE in FMLN organizations and the near-total lack of PE in state armed organizations are stark. PE was an institutional mainstay for the FMLN, although its form changed considerably over time. While military training took priority across all FMLN subgroups, the FMLN also instituted rigorous and wide-ranging general and political education. FMLN ex-combatants had notably less formal education than state ex-combatants upon joining the organization. However, as an institution the FMLN valorized education, and particularly literacy, as a means to self-determination and understanding.

A large number of FMLN interviewees reported that they learned to read during their first months in the group. "Popular education" (Hammond 1996, but see Freire 1970 for the original statement) was the model on which all FMLN curricula were based, both within the organization and among civilian communities organized by the FMLN (Binford 1997). This style of education was overtly political and extremely improvisational, employing teachers who themselves were often only semi-literate. Hammond (1996) poignantly recalls the first sentence many popular education students learned to read and write: "La casa de María era quemada." [Marias house was burned down.] Like FMLN political education materials, general education pamphlets often were mimeographed cartoons.

According to most FMLN interviewees, political education was somewhat less formal but also significantly more regular than general education. Prior to approximately 1982, no standardized political education program existed within the FMLN or its sub-groups. According to officers to whom I spoke, the unified command agreed that all combatants should receive instruction in the history of the struggle and the theories of Marxism early in the conflict, but no standard curriculum was implemented until approximately 1982. Written curricula were standardized still later, perhaps as late as 1985, when the earliest remaining copies of the

FMLN's *Los 15 Principios del Combatiente Guerrillero* (15 Principles of the Guerrilla Combatant) were produced. Nearly all FMLN combatants whose period of service continued through the mid-1980's reported receiving the 15 Principles, excerpts of which are shown in Figures 1 to 3.



Figure 1: Cover of the 15 Principles

Whereas literacy training ceased in the run-up to major operations, unit commanders (*responsables*) were tasked with continuing political education every day, typically by convening a meeting at which political topics were discussed. Frequently, these evening sessions consisted of tuning in to the ERP's Radio Venceremos (Lopez Vigil 1993 [1994 trans.]), then discussing



Figure 2: Principles 7 and 8



Figure 3: Principle 11

the news or programming presented. In addition, most FMLN units conducted regular sessions of “criticism and self-criticism,” in which the goals, values, and strategies of the organization were discussed and, importantly, those who had transgressed in some way were “invited” to speak about what they had done wrong and what they might improve in future. Here is how one mid-level officer (*responsable*) of the FPL described the use of criticism and self-criticism to enforce human rights norms (Interview 28):

[Q: What would happen if someone committed an offense like stealing?] OK, let’s say the guy comes to someone’s house in the zone under our control and says, you have to give me a chicken. That kind of stealing is a huge problem because it shows the population that when we have power we are just like the enemy. So, OK, I am his superior officer and I find out. I would probably punish someone like that by taking away his weapon, but also I would tell him, we are going to talk about this in the meeting. [...] Then I would tell everybody what he did, like, ‘So-and-so stole a chicken, and it reflects badly on us.’ Then he would admit to what he did, talk about why he did it, and we would discuss publicly why it was not correct. People learned from that because they knew they were betraying both the Frente and their friends. They learned, but ooh [whistles], they hated it.

While criticism and self-criticism was mentioned most frequently by ex-combatants of the FPL, veterans of all FMLN forces remarked on its power, both as an embarrassing spectacle and as an educational tool. One ex-combatant who had been caught stealing extra rations recalled her experience vividly: “I had to come to the meeting as usual and admit to everybody that I took food. From them. It was awful. Later when I was alone, I cried and cried” (Interview 60).

State ex-combatants received no such training. While some state ex-combatants could name a reason for the conflict, and/or for their participation in the conflict, most did not. Unlike FMLN combatants, members of the regular Salvadoran Army received, at minimum, a three-month course of formal military training before entering combat operations. However, no members of the Salvadoran Army reported receiving any formal training not directly associated with military skills, routines, or obedience during this period. A few interview and survey respondents from the Army reported that officers talked about “killing Communists [or ‘terrorists’, or ‘subversives’]” during training exercises, but most suggested that after a period of hazing they entered combat with poor to moderate military skills and no sense of the goal or purpose of the war.

Among my sample, no regular Army ex-combatant who joined the state military prior to approximately 1983 reported receiving any training in human rights, or civilian relations more generally. Those who joined later occasionally reported receiving a cursory introduction to human rights and the importance of human rights, but neither regular army ex-combatants or higher-level ex-combatants from immediate reaction battalions (*batallones de reacción inmediato*, BIRIs) or the security forces ever suggested that this training was institutionalized or repeated. One regular Army ex-combatant (Interview 20) recalled with some irritation the imposition of human rights training by Americans in the mid-1980s. I asked, “Did they ever tell you about human rights, or about how to treat civilians?” He answered, “There were no human rights until ’84, until the Americans came. Then we had to go listen to a speech about it.” He reported that the topic was never broached again during his Army service.

There exists some evidence of formal training regarding the historical background and purpose of the war among BIRI and security force combatants. Yet members of BIRIs Atlacatl, Bracamonte, Arce, and Atonal reported in interviews and surveys that this training (often, from approximately 1984 onward, performed by American trainers in El Salvador) was brief and perfunctory. One member of BIRI Atlacatl – the unit responsible, well before this fighter’s time, for the El Mozote massacre – stated, “We were, honestly, really scared of the Communists, you know, the terrorists and subversives. But I’m not sure we really knew why” (Interview 47). Overall, the most notable aspect of political education programs in state forces was their near-total absence. There were exceptions to this rule, but they were uncommon. Some members of the security forces reported hearing repeatedly (and, in one case, reading) that they were fighting to defend the country from Communism. Typically, they reported, “Communism” was a sort of all-purpose evil that would destroy El Salvador; only a few respondents (two veterans of the Treasury Police [PH] and one from the National Guard [GN]) reported knowing what the FMLNs goals were, even in a general fashion, or what Communism meant politically or economically.

One PH ex-combatant (Interview 53), who had served in the Salvadoran Army since the 1960’s and had transferred to the PH in the mid-1970’s, allowed me to copy a PH training document received in about 1983 (his estimate). The document, intended for members of the

“interrogation group” (*grupo de interrogadores*), was evidently designed both to familiarize personnel with the basic outlines of Communist thought and to convince them of the true danger of Communist takeover. The final section of the 14-page document is titled “What Life Will be Like in This Country if Communists Take Power,” and consists of a 27-point list of items such as “You will live in fear” and “The elimination of bourgeois morality will lead to corruption and sexual excesses among the youth.” I asked this informant what he thought when he received the book. His answer was equivocal. “I think maybe I believed it,” he said. “But it didn’t play a big role in what we did every day.”

Both the overall differences between violence by the FMLN and violence by the state in El Salvador, and the differences between the two groups over time and space, show very restrained violence by the FMLN and poorly controlled violence by state forces. FMLN violence was, by all accounts, carefully targeted and tightly controlled. I estimate (Hoover Green 2011, chapter 7–8) that killings by state agents outnumbered killings by FMLN forces by a ratio of at least 10:1. Differences between FMLN and state perpetration of non-lethal violence were still more stark: FMLN forces were named as perpetrators in under 1% of all reported episodes of non-lethal violence, including sexual violence, torture, and property crimes. Indeed, there were so few reported non-lethal crimes by FMLN cadre that MSE estimates failed to converge. In general, however, it is safe to conclude on the basis of the evidence that state combatants committed more violence overall, and much more non-lethal violence, than FMLN cadre.

This observation is borne out by data from 359 structured interviews with Salvadoran ex-combatants. Notably, a similar proportion of state and FMLN combatants reported that they “witnessed or heard about” mistreatment of civilians. However, FMLN ex-combatants were more likely to name non-physical mistreatment such as verbal abuse, whereas state ex-combatants typically identified episodes of physical abuse of ex-combatants. In addition, as shown below in table 1, among combatants who reported that they had witnessed or heard about violence against civilians, FMLN cadre report fewer types of violence, on average, than state ex-combatants.

Table 1: Selected Results from Structured Interviews

Measure	FMLN Ex-Combatants	State Ex-Combatants
N Respondents	162	197
Mean age at interview	49.55	48.52
Mean age at recruitment	20.39	21.37
% with no schooling at recruitment	38%	15%
% with > 7 years schooling at recruitment	7%	23%
% voluntarily recruited	75%	25%
% witnessing mistreatment of civilians	48%	47%
Of those witnessing mistreatment, mean number of violation types reported	1.83	2.50
Most commonly observed type of mistreatment	Bad or abusive language	Killing

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the data from both structured and semi-structured interviews was the extent to which it corroborated the view that sexual violence was common among state forces and much less common among FMLN cadre.³ Just 6 of 165 FMLN structured-interview respondents (3.6%) reported having witnessed or heard about sexual violence against civilians, whereas 33 of 194 (17%) of state ex-combatants had witnessed or heard about sexual violence.

A very plausible story to explain the difference between FMLN and state repertoires of violence concerns the two organizations' differing strategic incentives. In this version of the Salvadoran conflict, insurgents "had to be nice" because of their reliance on civilians for information, food, transport and other necessities. The state, in the strongest version of this

³ Of course, a number of issues may limit the reliability of this information. In particular, state ex-combatants generally were exposed to a much greater number of fellow soldiers, since they lived in barracks and (generally) fought in large formations, whereas FMLN cadre, especially later in the conflict, lived and fought in significantly smaller groups. Second, it is possible that FMLN ex-combatants are more attuned to the perception that sexual violence is, and should be perceived as, a highly stigmatized act, and that therefore FMLN ex-combatants are less likely in general to report sexual violence.

theoretical view, had no special incentive to treat civilians well, largely because it possessed the capacity to survive without civilian support, and/or because it possessed the capacity to compel civilian “support.” This appears to be a reasonable assessment of the generalities of state–FMLN differences, but it does a very poor job explaining intra-state or intra-FMLN differences; it also fails, to a large extent, to explain differences over time.

Within-group Differences: FPL vs. ERP

The two largest FMLN sub-groups were the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP, Revolutionary Army of the People), based in the northeastern department of Morazán, and the Fuerzas Populares de Liberación (FPL, Popular Forces of Liberation), based in the north-central department of Chalatenango.

The stark contrast between state institutions (or the lack thereof) and FMLN institutions should not entirely overshadow the important institutional differences within the FMLN, particularly during the early years of the conflict. FPL leaders had, from the outset, committed publicly to a strategy of prolonged popular war (e.g., Harnecker 1993, Pearce 1986), an approach often associated with Ho Chi Minh. This approach emphasizes the political aspects of guerrilla war over the military. It sees civilians and civilian agreement as essential to the revolutionary project. The FPL implemented the prolonged popular war model in several ways: it formed a non-violent political wing; in its zones of control, it instituted (and in some cases, even attended to the opinions of) citizens’ political committees. Its disciplinary system emphasized personal uprightness far more strongly than did the ERP’s.

The ERP, by contrast, formed a political wing only after several years of existence as an armed revolutionary organization, and adhered, particularly early in the conflict, to a Guevarist foquismo strategy. Here, the armed revolutionary movement is essentially a vanguard; politics is secondary to the military victory. Prior to the unification of FMLN political education schemes, ERP training emphasized military skill and the utility of civilians as allies to the military effort, rather than the inherent value of transformation and “conscientization” of civilian populations themselves.

The two factions' separate political education programs in the initial period of the war (approximately 1980–82) reflected these different priorities. FPL cadre from this period frequently spoke about “meetings” when I asked how they learned about the purposes of the war or the history of El Salvador. In these meetings, a responsable (typically a mid-level officer) would lead a conversation about some topic. Interview respondents mentioned both subjects belonging to the general category “liberation theology” (the preferential option for the poor, the martyrdom of the church) and general histories of El Salvador. A few FPL veterans explicitly compared political education meetings to meetings of Christian Base Communities (home Bible study groups, often tied to leftist priests) they had attended in the past. In addition to these meetings, which were explicitly instructive, “meetings” in the FPL were frequently used for disciplinary purposes.

While the FPL relied upon informal, if regular, meetings for several years, the ERP developed and deployed a written political education program relatively early in the war; its curriculum began with brief illustrated guides to the history of El Salvador (Level 1) and progressed to lengthier, and less heavily illustrated, outlines of Marxist principles. In general, early ERP recruits were significantly more likely than early FPL recruits to mention receiving printed matter, even though the levels of education and literacy reported by ex-combatants from the two factions were very similar. By the middle years of the war, however, political education materials in the two factions had been unified (see below, on change over time).

Differences in the violence wielded by FMLN sub-groups are quite difficult to estimate via MSE, largely because FMLN violence – particularly non-lethal violence by FMLN cadre – was rare relative to state violence. Thus, I focus here primarily upon survey, memoir and interview data.

The most notable result to emerge from FMLN ex-combatant structured interview responses is a significant difference between the types of violence noted by ERP ex-combatants and those noted by FPL ex-combatants, a difference that persisted, to some extent, throughout the conflict. Ex-combatants of the FPL were slightly less likely than those who served with the ERP to mention having “seen or heard about” mistreatment of non-combatants (51% versus 48%); however, among those who knew of mistreatment, FPL ex-combatants reported a

significantly higher mean number of types of violence (1.7, versus 1.1 for ERP cadre who witnessed civilian abuses). FPL cadre were more likely to have seen or heard about rape and sexual abuse (6% of cadre, versus 0 ERP ex-combatants), property destruction (22% versus 6%), and killing of non-combatants (22% versus 0). ERP cadre, by contrast, were more likely to have witnessed theft of food or money and killing of livestock. Data from in-depth interviews also support the view that ERP violence was rather better controlled than FPL violence, particularly early in the conflict. FPL officers frequently referenced “discipline problems” related to noncombatant abuse when speaking about the early years of the war.

Available MSE results also suggest that that FPL cadre committed more lethal violence, as well. I estimate that FMLN forced committed roughly twice as many killings and disappearances in the central region (including Chalatenango, Cabanas and San Vicente, the stronghold of the FPL) than in the eastern region of Morazán, San Miguel and La Unión, where the ERP was based.

Differences among FMLN factions (assuming that the data considered here are representative of FMLN practices, and FMLN violence, as a whole) provide important nuance to the Commander’s Dilemma framework. In particular, differences between the FPL and the ERP during the early years of the conflict suggest that, despite the FPL’s potentially more civilian-friendly prolonged popular war approach, it suffered significant episodes of un-ordered violence against civilians during the early years of the conflict. The ERP constructed a formalized political education program much earlier than the FPL and (in consequence?) committed much more controlled violence during the period when the two groups’ institutions diverged.

Change Over Time

Above I hypothesized that PE institutions should mediate the effects of conflict duration on levels and repertoires of violence, with non-PER groups committing more violence, and a wider repertoire of violence, over time. In the Salvadoran case, the micro-level data largely bear out this hypothesis, although the association between conflict duration and level of violence appears weaker than the association between conflict duration and repertoire of violence.

The proportion of lethal violence by state forces changed dramatically over the course of the conflict. In both 1980–81 and 1989, the state response to an FMLN offensive caused a massive spike in total civilian casualties. However, whereas in the early phase of the war that violence was concentrated in acts of lethal violence, the increase in lethal violence during 1989 was minimal compared to the increase in non-lethal forms of violence such as sexual violence and torture.

A popular narrative of the Salvadoran conflict suggests that “violence” by state forces declined significantly in late 1983, after then-Vice President George H.W. Bush threatened, in a speech to the Salvadoran Chamber of Commerce, that the US would cut off military aid if high levels of violence continued. However, it appears that the decline in violence was uneven (Hoover Green 2011). Lethal violence declined significantly, but was replaced by non-lethal forms of violence such as torture, sexual violence, and non-lethal physical attacks. Thus, repertoires of violence widened while the total amount of violence remained roughly similar.

For the FMLN, by contrast, conflict duration appears to have had relatively little effect upon violence against civilians, a remarkable fact given the organization’s profound shift in strategy during 1984–1985. FMLN violence remained concentrated in lethal violence (killings and disappearances) and abductions throughout the conflict. There is no time period for which MSE estimates of non-lethal violence by FMLN cadre converge. However, the estimated proportion of total violence taken up by killings and disappearances is relatively stable over time, implying that the proportion of non-lethal violence is similarly stable.

Both survey results and interview results provide more detail than MSE estimates where FMLN repertoires of violence are concerned. In particular, while opinions varied as to the precise date of the change, FMLN combatants who joined prior to the “official” beginning of war in 1980, or during the earliest years of the war (1980–82), were more likely to report that discipline had improved during their time in the FMLN than were those who joined later. However, earlier-recruited FMLN combatants and those reported later were equally likely to report that officers “usually” or “always” punished abuses against noncombatants, implying that discipline, *per se*, may not have been the relevant causal factor. Officers whom I interviewed suggested that the institutionalization of political education, and particularly its increasing

emphasis on the importance of civilians as allies, played a major role in limiting violence against non-combatants to acts ordered by the hierarchy.

One plausible alternative to the Commander's Dilemma framework is a strategic explanation in which killing is more tightly coupled to strategic imperatives than are other forms of violence against non-combatants. Were this the case, we would expect to see killing vary with strategic incentives while non-lethal violence varied according to alternative logics. This potential explanation is appealing, but does not explain the timing of changes in the level or repertoire of violence against noncombatants.

To take a specific example, consider the 2–3 years (roughly 1980–82) during which the FMLN high command, though well aware of its need to guard relationships with civilians, nevertheless observed that significant numbers of un-ordered civilian abuses were occurring in its zones of control. Many or most of these abuses were not lethal; several mid- and high-level officers reported in interviews that “guys were coming down [from the hills] into town and abusing women” (Interview 6) or that “We had a big problem with stealing” (Interview 24). Despite the fact that good relations with civilians were strategically vital to all FMLN organizations, particularly during the under-resourced first years of the conflict, repertoires narrowed only with the institutionalization of political education programs.

The Role of Forced Recruitment

An important set of explanations for violence against civilians suggests that recruiting practices should be strongly associated with both levels and repertoires of violence. Weinstein (2007) hypothesizes that groups which recruit using the promise of contraband or other material payment attract “bad types” relative to groups that can offer only solidary incentives, and consequently that such groups should engage in more violence against civilians. Weinstein does not refer specifically to repertoires of violence, but his discussion implies that, in addition to committing higher levels of violence, groups made up of “bad types” should be more likely to use sexual violence and other frequently opportunistic types of violence.

Cohen (2013) suggests an alternate mechanism by which recruitment is associated with violence. In Cohen's theory, sexual violence, particularly including gang rape, is a costly

socialization mechanism used among fighters who are unknown to one another; thus, forced recruitment should be associated with the use of sexual violence in particular.

Weinstein's theory has some support in the Salvadoran case: ex-combatants from state forces who reported that they joined voluntarily (a minority) frequently reported that their decision was based on material necessity. FMLN forces, by contrast, were not offered any pay. And, as we have seen, state forces used both higher levels and wider repertoires of violence than did FMLN forces. However, differences between violence by Salvadoran state forces and violence perpetrated by the FMLN also maps a number of other differences: the FMLN arguably had a more pressing strategic incentive to protect civilians and, as we have seen, it had stronger institutions for political education. From the Salvadoran case, it is rather difficult to distinguish Weinstein's theory from others.

Cohen's theory, on the other hand, can be examined using micro-level variation from the Salvadoran conflict. In particular, we should expect that variation in the use of forced recruiting should be associated with variation in the incidence of sexual violence. This association holds when we consider broad differences between state forces (in which a majority of recruits were conscripts) and the FMLN (in which most recruits joined voluntarily). But, looking more closely at variation in sexual violence by FMLN forces, we find no evidence of an increase in sexual violence associated with a temporary policy of forced recruitment by the ERP in 1984–85, in Morazán department. Indeed, while violence by the FMLN in Morazán during this period increased somewhat, it appears that nearly all the additional violence was due to an announced ERP campaign in which local mayors (who, according to the ERP, were government collaborators) were targeted for assassination. Of course, this is only one case. But it does suggest that the role of socialization may be mediated, much like the role of conflict duration, by armed group institutions.

Discussion

Highly detailed, micro-level comparisons such as the Salvadoran case can provide important evidence about the role of armed group institutions, including political education. However, both the relatively low number of cases in a given conflict and the patchiness of

micro-level data on violence render firm conclusions difficult. A more rigorous test would directly compare competing causal hypotheses across a broader number of cases, in one of three ways: by replicating micro-level studies across an array of conflicts, by conducting an internationally comparable survey of combatants and ex-combatants across several conflicts and conflict types, or by gathering global observational data on armed group institutions.

Political scientists have gathered an impressive array of data on conflict and armed groups, including global convenience data on battle deaths (Lacina and Gleditsch 2005), an index measure of sexual violence by rebel and government forces (Cohen 2013), data on recruitment ([PRIO Rebel Recruitment Project]), measures of separatist organization factionalism (Cunningham 2012), and others. However, none of these datasets (and indeed, little secondary literature) systematically compares armed group training programs, either military or political. Future research should address this gap.

The analysis of armed group institutions is a promising, and still under-studied, area of scholarship. As noted in the Introduction, while it seems increasingly clear that armed group institutions and practices affect violence against civilians, it remains unclear which practices and institutions do the affecting, via what causal mechanism. Both theory and evidence about political education's role in shaping armed group behavior toward civilians are compelling – but far from probative.

Within the policy community, questions about whether, how and by whom violence against civilians *can* be shaped remain hotly contested. Policy organizations – perhaps particularly those, like the United Nations, that concern themselves with the protection of civilian populations during conflict – are keenly interested in humanly controllable (as opposed to structural or environmental) causes of violence against civilians, ever hopeful that a particular set of interventions may succeed at preventing or mitigating violence.

Institutional theories of violence (and non-violence) suggest that such interventions may be possible, if only on a limited scale. They suggest, first, that some types of armed organizations are particularly vulnerable to committing widespread violence, and therefore should be monitored more closely than others. Second, they suggest that, for commanders who see civilian protection as a military effectiveness issue, policy solutions are available. And the existence of

policies known to control violence against civilians suggests, in turn, that commanders are ethically and perhaps legally obligated to implement such policies.

References

- Abbey, Antonia, Angela J. Jacques-Tiura, and James M. LeBreton. 2011. "Risk Factors for Sexual Aggression in Young Men: An Expansion of the Confluence Model." *Aggressive Behavior* 37 (September): 450–464. PMID: 21678429 PMCID: PMC3139770.
- Arendt, Hannah. [1963] 1994. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a report on the banality of evil*. Penguin.
- Arkin, William, and Lynne R. Dobrofsky. 1978. "Military socialization and masculinity." *Journal of Social Issues* 34 (1): 151–168.
- Arnson, Cynthia. 2003. "Window on the Past: A Declassified History of Death Squads in El Salvador." In *Death Squads in Global Perspective: Murder with Deniability*, ed. Bruce Campbell and Arthur Brenner. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Asch, Solomon E. 1956. "Studies of independence and conformity: A minority of one against a unanimous majority." *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied* 70 (9): 1–70.
- Balcells, Laia, and Stathis N. Kalyvas. 2010. "Did Marxism Make a Difference? National Liberation versus Ethnic Insurgencies." Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C. <http://digital.csic.es/handle/10261/58669>.
- Ball, Patrick, Jana Asher, David Sulmont, and Daniel Manrique. 2003. *How Many Peruvians Have Died? An Estimate of the Total Number of Victims Killed or Disappeared in the Internal Armed Conflict Between 1980 and 2000*. Washington, DC: American Association for the Advancement of Science.
- Bass, Bernard M. 1991. "From transactional to transformational leadership: Learning to share the vision." *Organizational dynamics* 18 (3): 193–211.
- Beckham, Jean C., Scott D. Moore, and Victoria Reynolds. 2000. "Interpersonal hostility and violence in Vietnam combat veterans with chronic posttraumatic stress disorder: A review of theoretical models and empirical evidence." *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 5 (5): 451–466.
- Binford, Leigh. 1998. "Hegemony in the interior of the Salvadoran revolution: the ERP in northern Morazan." *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 4 (1): 245.
- Chandler, Raymond. 2012. "The Professional Soldier: The Essence of Today's Army." *Army Magazine* (October): 35–40.
- Cohen, Dara Kay. 2013a. "Explaining Rape during Civil War: Cross-National Evidence (1980–2009)." *American Political Science Review* 107 (03): 461–477.

- Cohen, Dara Kay. 2013b. "Female Combatants and the Perpetration of Violence: Wartime Rape in the Sierra Leone Civil War." *World Politics* 65 (3): 383-415.
- Cunningham, Kathleen Gallagher, Kristin M. Bakke, and Lee J.M. Seymour. 2012. "Shirts Today, Skins Tomorrow: Dual Contests and the Effects of Fragmentation in Self-Determination Disputes." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56 (February): 67-93.
- Darden, Keith. 2011. *Resisting Occupation: Mass Literacy and the Creation of Durable National Loyalties*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Darden, Keith, and Anna Grzymala-Busse. 2006. "The Great Divide: Literacy, Nationalism and the Communist Collapse." *World Politics* 59 (1): 83-115.
- Diener, Edward. 1980. "Deindividuation: The absence of self-awareness and self-regulation in group members." *The psychology of group influence*: 209-242.
- Downes, Alexander. 2008. *Targeting civilians in war*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Drescher, Kent D., David W. Foy, Caroline Kelly, Anna Leshner, Kerrie Schutz, and Brett Litz. 2011. "An exploration of the viability and usefulness of the construct of moral injury in war veterans." *Traumatology* 17 (1): 81-3.
- Formica, Anthony. 2012. "Lost in Transmission: How the Army has Garbled the Message about the Nature of its Profession." *Military Review* (April): 44-52.
- Freire, Paulo. 2000. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Gates, Scott. 2002. "Recruitment and Allegiance: The Microfoundations of Rebellion." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46 (1): 111-130.
- Goffman, Erving. 1961. *Asylums*. New York: Doubleday.
- Goldstein, Joshua S. 2003. *War and gender: How gender shapes the war system and vice versa*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Grossman, Dave. 1996. *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*. New York: Back Bay Books.
- Hammond, John L. 1996. "Popular Education in the Salvadoran Guerrilla Army." *Human organization* 55 (4): 436-445.
- Haney, Craig, Curtis Banks, and Philip Zimbardo. 1973. "Interpersonal Dynamics in a Simulated Prison." *International Journal of Criminology and Penology* 1: 69-97.
- Hoover Green, Amelia. 2011. "Repertoires of Violence Against Non-Combatants: The Role of Armed Group Institutions and Ideology." Ph.D. diss. Yale University.
- Hovil, Lucy, and Eric Werker. 2005. "Portrait of a Failed Rebellion An Account of Rational, Sub-Optimal Violence in Western Uganda." *Rationality and Society* 17 (1): 53-4.

- Humphreys, Macartan, and Jeremy M. Weinstein. 2006. "Handling and manhandling civilians in civil war." *American Political Science Review* 100 (3): 429.
- Huntington, Samuel P. 1957. *The soldier and the state: The theory and politics of civil-military relations*. Harvard University Press.
- Jakupcak, Matthew, and Matthew T. Tull. 2005. "Effects of trauma exposure on anger, aggression, and violence in a nonclinical sample of men." *Violence and victims* 20 (5): 589-598.
- Kalyvas, Stathis N. 2006. *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge University Press.
- Keinan, Giora. 1987. "Decision making under stress: scanning of alternatives under controllable and uncontrollable threats." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 52 (3): 639.
- Kurpius, Sharon E. Robinson, and A. Leigh Lucart. 2000. "Military and civilian undergraduates: Attitudes toward women, masculinity, and authoritarianism." *Sex Roles* 43 (3-4): 255-265.
- Lacina, Bethany, and Nils Petter Gleditsch. 2005. "Monitoring trends in global combat: A new dataset of battle deaths." *European Journal of Population/Revue europeenne de Demographie* 21 (2-3): 145-166.
- Laffont, Jean-Jacques, and David Martimort. 2009. *The Theory of Incentives: The Principal-Agent Model*. Princeton University Press.
- Lum, Kristian, Megan Price, Tamy Guberek, and Patrick Ball. 2010. "Measuring elusive populations with bayesian model averaging for multiple systems estimation: A case study on lethal violations in casanare, 1998-2007." *Statistics, Politics, and Policy* 1 (1).
- Manekin, Devorah. 2013. "Violence Against Civilians in the Second Intifada The Moderating Effect of Armed Group Structure on Opportunistic Violence." *Comparative Political Studies*.
- Milgram, Stanley. 2009. *Obedience to authority: An experimental view*. Harpercollins.
- Mitchell, Neil J. [2004] 2009. *Agents of atrocity: Leaders, followers, and the violation of human rights in civil war*. Macmillan.
- Nadelson, Theodore. 2005. *Trained to kill: Soldiers at war*. JHU Press.
- Osiel, Mark. 1999. *Obeying Orders: Atrocity, Military Discipline and the Law of War*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Reicher, Stephen, and S. Alexander Haslam. 2006. "Rethinking the psychology of tyranny: The BBC prison study." *British Journal of Social Psychology* 45 (1): 140.
- Ron, James. 1997. "Varying methods of state violence." *International Organization* 51 (2): 275-300.

- Ron, James. 2000. "Boundaries and violence: Repertoires of state action along the Bosnia/Yugoslavia divide." *Theory and Society* 29 (5): 609-649.
- Shibutani, Tamotsu. 1978. *The derelicts of Company K: A sociological study of demoralization*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Song, Li-yu, Mark I. Singer, and Trina M. Anglin. 1998. "Violence exposure and emotional trauma as contributors to adolescents' violent behaviors." *Archives of pediatrics & adolescent medicine* 152 (6): 531.
- Stanley, William Deane. 1996. *The protection racket state: Elite politics, military extortion, and civil war in El Salvador*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Stowe, Jill. 2006. "Incorporating Morale into a Classical Agency Model: Incentives, Effort, and Organization." <http://faculty.fuqua.duke.edu/stowe/bio/Professional>
- Thaler, Kai M. 2012. "Ideology and Violence in Civil Wars: Theory and Evidence from Mozambique and Angola." *Civil Wars* 14 (4): 546-567.
- US Army Center for the Army Profession and Ethic. 2012. *The Army Profession*. Technical report. <http://cape.army.mil/Army>
- Valentino, Benjamin, Paul Huth, and Dylan Balch-Lindsay. 2004. "Draining the sea: mass killing and guerrilla warfare." *International Organization* 58 (2): 375-407.
- Weinstein, Jeremy M. 2007. *Inside Rebellion*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Wood, Elisabeth Jean. 2003. *Insurgent collective action and civil war in El Salvador*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Wood, Elisabeth Jean. 2009. "Armed Groups and Sexual Violence: When Is Wartime Rape Rare?"